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The Château of Langeais

Described & Illustrated

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THE

CHATEAU of LANGEAIS

Described and Illustrated

PARIS
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The Château of Langeais.

ONE might say that there are two castles at Langeais: the donjon of Fulk the Black and the present château.

When Count Fulk of Anjou, surnamed the Black Falcon, planned the conquest of Touraine, he began by building several advanced strongholds on its borders. Thus, at Langeais, on the hill shaped like a promontory, which was protected on one side by the Loire and on the other by the river Roumer, he built, in 984, the fortress whose imposing ruins still command the surrounding country. The walls are constructed of courses of stones in the Gallo-Roman style so much admired by archæologists. Beneath these ruins stretches a park in which, here and there, are to be found traces of defensive works, and, in addition, the perfectly preserved foundations of an eleventh century chapel, on the subject of which we shall later have more to say. Visitors are not admitted to this park, which, however, would have but a secondary interest for the majority of them.

From an historical point of view, Fulk the Black's stronghold particularly recalls its builder, whose portrait we find so admirably drawn by J. R. Green in his *History of the English People*. "Fulk Nerra, Fulk the Black," he writes, "is the greatest of the Angevins, the first in whom we can trace the marked type of character which their house was to preserve with a fatal constancy through two hundred years. He was without natural affection. In his youth he burnt a wife at the stake, and legend told

how he led her to her doom decked out in her gayest attire. In his old age he waged his bitterest war against his son, and exacted from him when vanquished a humiliation which men reserved for the deadliest of their foes. You are conquered, you are conquered!' shouted the old man in fierce exultation, as Geoffrey, bridled and saddled like a beast of burden, crawled for pardon to his father's feet. In Fulk first appeared the low type of superstition which startled even superstitious ages in the early Plantagenets. Robber as he was of church lands, and contemptuous of ecclesiastical censures, the fear of the judgment drove Fulk to the Holy Sepulchre. Barefoot, and with the stroke of the scourge falling heavily on his shoulders, the Count had himself dragged by a halter through the streets of Jerusalem, and courted the doom of martyrdom by his wild outbursts of penitence. He rewarded the fidelity of Hubert of Le Mans, whose aid saved him from utter ruin, by entrapping him into captivity and robbing him of his lands. He secured the terrified friendship of the French King by despatching twelve assassins to cut down before his eyes the minister who had troubled it. Familiar as the age was with treason and rapine and blood, it recoiled from the cool cynicism of his crimes, and believed the wrath of Heaven to have been revealed against the union of the worst forms of evil in Fulk the Black. But neither the wrath of Heaven nor the curses of men broke with a single mishap the fifty years of his success... Cool-headed, clear-sighted, quick to resolve, quicker to strike, Fulk's career was one long series of victories over his rivals. He was a consummate general, and he had the gift of personal bravery which was denied to some of his greatest descendants. To these qualities of the warrior he added a power of political organisation, a capacity for far-reaching combinations, a faculty of statesmanship, which became the heritage of the Angevins, and lifted them as high above the intellectual level of the rulers of their time as their shameless wickedness degraded them below the level of man."

At the beginning of the twelfth century a great event took place in the religious annals of Langeais. Fulk V., surnamed the Younger, Count of Anjou and Touraine, took part in the crusade to the Holy

Land and married Millicent, daughter of Baldwin II., King of Jerusalem, whom he was to succeed. Thence, says the Abbé Bossebœuf in his book entitled *Langeais et son château*, he brought back a noteworthy relic from the Holy Sepulchre, as well as another from Our Saviour's manger. On his return "he built a basilica in the Langeais fortress and placed these relics therein." This basilica was the Chapel of Our Saviour, the remains of which, as already mentioned, are found in the park, and the foundation of which was the subject of a donative charter signed by Fulk in 1118.

The son of Fulk the Younger married Matilda, daughter of Henry I., King of England. Their children were Geoffrey Plantagenet, who received his surname owing to a habit of wearing a sprig of broom in his hat, and Henry, who became King of England and who was the father of the famous Richard the Lion-Hearted, who in his turn was King of England, Count of Touraine, and Lord of Langeais. We are acquainted with the tragic event which changed the political aspect a few years after Richard's death. On the eve of Good Friday, 1203, there glided mysteriously under the walls of the Château of Rouen a boat containing three men and a child. Suddenly a knife flashed in the dim glimmer of the moon and a dead body fell into the water. John Lackland had rid himself of Arthur of Brittany. Arraigned before the Court of Paris, John had his possessions confiscated by Philip Augustus. Henceforth Langeais was Crown property, though it was many times granted to private individuals as a reward for services to the king. Thus, in 1218, the château passed into the hands of Hugh X. de Lusignan, who had married Isabeau, the widow of John Lackland.

One of the most interesting of the figures which stand out against the background of the donjon of Langeais is that of Pierre de la Brosse, who raised himself from the position of barber-surgeon of Louis IX., to that of Prime Minister. The King presented Fulk's fortress to him, and he made great improvements to it. His humble birth and the extraordinary favour in which he was held by the King greatly excited the jealousy of the nobility, who sought to bring about his ruin. Philip the Bold had taken as a

second wife Mary of Brabant, who had a particular dislike to the Minister, so she and her friends accused him of holding treasonable intercourse with the King of Castille, who was then at war with France. Philip paid little heed to the accusation, but Pierre de la Brosse did, and waited for an opportunity to lodge a counter-complaint. The King's son, by his first wife, died shortly afterwards, and Pierre de la Brosse dropped a hint that the Queen might have poisoned her stepson. This was quite in accordance with the spirit of the times, and so also was the means which the King took to discover the Queen's guilt or innocence. In a nunnery, in a distant part of France, there was a nun who was supposed to possess the gift of prophecy, and two envoys—one of whom was a relative, and the other a friend of De la Brosse—were sent to lay the matter before her, and ask her opinion. It was said that they tried to bribe the nun to proclaim the Queen guilty, but she was too shrewd to imperil her professional reputation as a soothsayer, so replied in one of those ambiguous phrases which have been favoured by all oracles since the days of Delphi. The King read it as a proof of the Queen's innocence, and, remembering the former charge against Pierre de la Brosse, condemned him to death. He was hanged at Montfaucon, outside Paris, on June 30th 1278.

From that time until 1466 there were only governors, or castellans, at Langeais. Meanwhile, however, the steady invasion of Touraine by the English brought about the capture of the castle in 1427, and it was not until the days of Joan of Arc that that province was definitely freed from the foreign yoke.

Charles VII , as soon as he had rid himself of the English, turned his attention to the interior organisation of his Kingdom, and, in April, 1453, issued a decree authorising the law officers of the Crown to assemble at Langeais to draw up the "Customs, Ways and Usages of Touraine." This great work was not completed until 1461. In the Rouen Library is a manuscript of it on parchment, written in Gothic characters of the fifteenth century.

It was about this time, that is to say about 1461 or 1462, that the present château was begun by Louis XI., who placed the work in the hands of Jean Bourré, his Comptroller of Finances. It is situated at the foot of Fulk's donjon, to which it was joined by walls which still tower, on the north, above the pretty little valley of the Roumer and, on the south, above the superb valley of the Loire. The whole formed a defensive quadrilateral. We know, in addition, that Jean Briçonnet, in his quality as Receiver General of Finances, was "paymaster for the works and buildings of the Château of Langeais" in 1465 and 1467.

The rapidity with which the château was built explains the remarkable unity of the style of its architecture. The materials used—notably its chestnut woodwork—were excellent in quality and have so well resisted the effects of time that the château is to-day certainly one of the finest examples of the military architecture of the Middle Ages in existence. Its interior decoration was completed by the son of the celebrated Bastard of Orleans, Francis of Orleans, Count of Dunois and Longueville, who by letters given at Montargis on July 2nd, 1466, obtained the domain of Langeais from Louis XI., and who, it is believed, added the two large chimney-pieces which are still to be seen in two of the principal rooms.

From the family of the princes of Orleans the château passed into that of the princes of Bourbon. Louis of Bourbon having married Joan of France, Louis XI's natural daughter by Marguerite de Sassenage, he received "the fortress and château of Langeais," in March, 1476, as a dowry. To him we owe the finest parts of the parish church: the steeple, which is one of the most remarkable in Touraine, and the sacristy in the flamboyant style with its vaulted roof and prismatic mouldings on the central pendentive of which is his escutcheon—azure, three fleurs de lys or, baton gules.

But the time was drawing near when the château of Langeais was to be the scene of the event which, amongst all others, has made it famous: the marriage of Charles VIII. and Anne of Brittany on

December 16th, 1491, which had the effect of uniting Brittany to France. When a child, Charles had been engaged to Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Maximilian, Emperor of Germany. This princess was brought up at the French Court as the future wife of the young king, and Maximilian himself had been engaged by proxy to Anne, Duchess of Brittany. But Anne of Beaujeu, the daughter of Louis XI., who acted as Regent during the minority of Charles VIII., had inherited great political skill from her father, and forthwith began to use it. According to Brantôme, "Charles having perceived that it was not well to have so powerful a lord within his kingdom, deprived Maximilian of the said Anne and married her." In spite of the opposition which she at first showed to the marriage, the affair was carried out with such cleverness and troops were advanced on her possessions with such timeliness that she consented to become Queen of France. To escape the opposition party which wanted to get her to England, she arrived secretly at the Château of Langeais, where King Charles was awaiting her.

The marriage contract was drawn up by Pierre Bonneau, the Apostolic Notary, and Guy Leclerc, the Crown Notary. The principal conditions were the reunion of Brittany to France and, in order to make this doubly sure, the obligation on the part of the Queen, should the King die without issue, to marry his successor. As we know, this strange clause was, in fact, carried out. The nuptial benediction was pronounced by the Bishop of Angers, in the presence of the Duke of Orleans (the future Louis XII. and her second husband), the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Bourbon, the Count of Angoulême, the Count de Foy, the Count of Vendôme, and William of Rochefort, Chancellor of France. The Duchess Anne was accompanied by Arthur of Montauban, Bishop of Bordeaux and Chancellor of Brittany, the Sire de Coëtquen, and John III. of Pontbriant.

Anne arrived at Langeais "in a travelling-dress of cloth and velvet, trimmed with a hundred and thirty-nine sable skins," and on a palfrey adorned with three ells of crimson velvet. She was pretty—or

at least had the beauty of youth—and Brantôme describes the black eyes and well-marked eyebrows, long black hair, fresh complexion, and dimpled chin, and the only defect he noticed was that one leg was a trifle shorter than the other, which he is careful to add is hardly a defect at all, for it was also the case with many "beauteous and virtuous dames" with whom he was acquainted. Her wedding dress displayed a rare magnificence; it was made of cloth of gold, embroidered with gold and trimmed with one hundred and sixty sable skins, which cost 4,200 livres.

The history of Langeais during the three succeeding centuries may be summed up in a few lines. First of all, we must probably consider as a legend the assertion that the château, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, belonged to Cardinal du Bellay, the friend and protector of Rabelais. The Du Bellay family owned the Château of Langey in the department of Eure-et-Loir and not that of Langeais. Moreover, the charming "Maison de Rabelais" which is to be seen opposite the château, cannot, strictly speaking, have been inhabited by the celebrated writer, though it is quite possible he may have visited it. By letters patent dated September 16th, 1547, Henry II. gave the lordship of Langeais, in return for services, to the Duke of Somma, one of the favourites of Francis I. Charles IX. received hospitality there on November 19th, 1565; Louis XIII., descending the Loire to Saumur, landed at the port of Langeais in October, 1627, dined at the château, and, according to the report of an eye-witness, Dr Herouard, who never left him, "undressed at nine o'clock, got into bed at half-past nine, prayed, and then slept until six o'clock in the morning.

About this time the château, which up to then had been in the possession of but temporary owners, definitely ceased to belong to the Crown, and Louise of Lorraine, the daughter of the celebrated Duke of Guise, became its absolute owner in 1631. But she sold it soon afterwards for 59,300 livres to Antoine Coëffier, known as Ruzé, Marquis of Effiat, Baron of Cinq-Mars, Marshal of France, and Superintendent of Finances, whose son Henry is celebrated in history owing to the part he took in the

conspiracy which brought about his decapitation in 1642 and which resulted in the destruction of the castle whose ruins are to be seen a few miles from Langeais. One of the lords of Langeais whose name throws the most glory on the château during the second half of the seventeenth century is the Duke of Mazarin, in whom the Cardinal found so many good qualities that he gave him his name and his niece Hortense Mancini with twenty-eight millions. The Effiat family sold the domain of Langeais in 1765 to Baron de Champchevrier for 27,000 livres, but in the following year, Marie Charles Albert, Duke of Luynes, obtained letters patent authorising him to exercise the right of feudal repurchase. His son, Duke Louis Joseph, remained owner of the château during the entire revolutionary period, and its preservation is due to him. The only sacrifices he made, in all probability, were the coats of arms which ornamented some of the chimney-pieces, and the chapel which terminated, as shown by recent excavations, the south-west wing.

The Duke of Luynes sold the château in 1798 to M. Moisant, of Tours, for 170,000 francs, but the new owner took no care whatever of it; indeed, it was left in such a state of abandonment that inhabitants of neighbouring houses used it as a place for storing their wood and drying their clothes. With a view to economy in building, the peasants constructed their houses against the château. As to the park, they divided it into sixty plots, which they planted with vines. The municipality itself could find nothing better to do than to transform the large room on the ground-floor into a stable for the gendarmes!

Such was its state in 1833 when a Parisian attorney, M. Baron, bought it for a mere trifle. Endowed with a most original mind, he inaugurated his ownership by two measures which are worthy of being mentioned. He informed the owners of the houses abutting on the château, that he was disposed to purchase them for triple their value if evacuated the first year, for double their value the year following, and for their exact value the third year. If, at the end of three years, they had not accepted his proposal,

he intended to set the law in motion and turn them out without paying a penny. The result was that he obtained almost all the houses at their market value, for their owners stubbornly insisted on remaining where they were until the very last moment.

As to the holders of the vineyards in the park, he called a meeting of them one Sunday afternoon. A notary read a deed of sale offering them twice the value, but containing a final clause stipulating that the sixty owners should he unanimous in accepting the offer. Left to themselves, the peasant-proprietors began to discuss the matter. Calm at first, the meeting soon became noisy; then the sound of blows was heard, followed by cries; and finally, it was in a perfect uproar. However, towards evening they had come to a mutual understanding and the sixty signatures were affixed to the agreement.

Numerous such stories are related about M. Baron. One more only need be given. Having had reason to complain of the Mayor and his two deputies, he informed them, to their great satisfaction, that his archæological researches had led him to discover the arms of the town of Langeais: a big melon supported by two smaller melons! *

This excellent owner restored the exterior of the château to a perfect state of preservation. But it was reserved to M. and Mme. Jacques Siegfried to reconstitute its interior in the most faithful and purest style. With the assistance of a talented young architect, M. Lucien Roy, and such distinguished archæologists as MM. Palustre, Edmond Foulc, Spitzer, Emile Peyre and Bonaffé, they devoted twenty years to the accomplishment of this admirable work.

The pieces of furniture in these fine old rooms are all either genuine antiques or scrupulously exact copies of works of art in museums or private collections. It is interesting to know that the valley of Aosta has provided the most specimens in the Gothic style analogous to the French Gothic. The mural

* "Melon" in popular French is equivalent to "Imbécile"

paintings, almost always done by the encaustic process, and the woodwork which also decorates the walls have been inspired by the most authentic documents. The tiled floors—one of the characteristics of this château—have been specially manufactured, the designs being copied either from ancient tiles in museums or from those represented in pictures contemporary with the building of the château. Finally, the tapestries, which are so remarkable that they constitute a most valuable collection in themselves, have almost all a history or a pedigree.

It is only by visiting the château, however, that one can get an exact idea of the scrupulous care which has been taken over its restoration. To describe this work in detail would be impossible in the space at our disposal, so we shall limit ourselves to pointing out a few of the works of art in the various rooms, taking them in the order in which they are visited by the public.

The little Salon adjoining the Vestibule contains a piece of woodwork composed of twenty-seven Gothic panels which were formerly in the Church of Moulins la Marche in the department of the Orne, and which have been painted by M. Bonaffé himself in the style of the period.

In the following room the mural decoration, copied from Anne of Brittany's "Book of Hours," is the work of M. Lameire. The miniatures of this celebrated MS. were painted by Bourdichon, who received 1050 livres for them in 1508. The original is in the National Library, but a copy is to be seen in the château. The large cupboard and the woodwork are copies of those in the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, in Paris. The fire-screen, painted in grey camaieu, belonged to Louise or Vaudemont, widow of Henri III. and formed part of the furniture in the mourning-room (chambre de deuil) occupied by the Queen at Chenonceaux.

The next room you enter contains mural encaustic paintings copied from the remains of a piece of wall decoration found in the ruins of the Château of Coucy. The andirons in the large Guard-Room (now the dining-room of the château) came from the former Château of Chanteloup. The large stalls

were purchased by M. Spitzer at the Church of Arques-la-Bataille; and the big bronze mortar bears the date 1533.

On the first floor, the seven large tapestries in the Salon—the remains of a series called the "Neuf Preux," or "Nine Heroes"—have formed the subject of an important pamphlet by Mgr. Barbier de Montault. He is of the opinion that they date from between 1520 and 1540, and that they were made for and at the Château de Chauray, now the Reversé Printing Works of St. Maixent. In the bedrooms, the beds are either authentic antiques or copies made from ancient paintings; and it will be noticed that their curtains are tucked up in accordance with ancient custom. In one of the bedrooms on the first floor is a tapestry representing St. Saturninus and St. John the Baptist. It is the first of a series which was given by Jacques Semblançay to the Church of St. Saturninus, at Tours, in 1527. The three others—considered to be the gems of the collection—are at present in the Angers Cathedral. The Gothic Tapestry in the same room, and which represents Christ on the Cross, the Virgin Mary and St. John, dates from the fifteenth century and was once in the collection of M. Goupil. A fine engraving represents Charles Orland, son of Charles VIII and Anne of Brittany, who died when a child and whose admirably carved tomb is to be seen, as you are aware, in the Tours Cathedral.

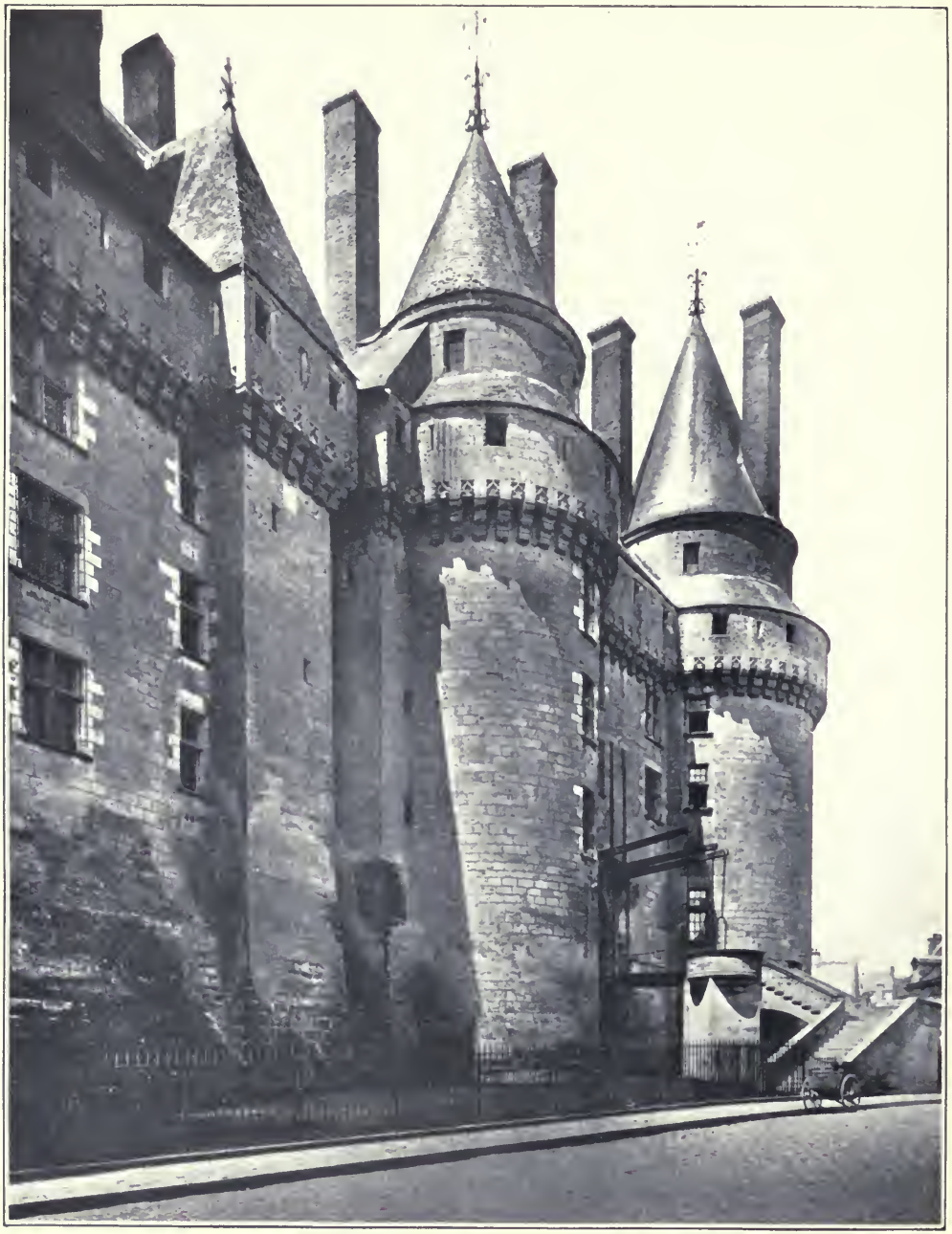
On the second floor you will notice a large cabinet, which is quite in keeping with the severe architecture of the château. The same remark may also be applied to the fine fresco by Bernardino Luini, dated 1422, which came from a chapel in Locarno. In the same room are two Italian Renaissance chests ornamented with paintings and bearing the arms of the Chigi family. The superb tapestry made in 1450 for the Abbey of Ronceray at Angers was on view at the Angers Retrospective Exhibition in 1858. It was claimed by the State as national property, but in vain.

The series of rooms on the third floor and their tapestries are worthy of a more detailed description, but we must hasten on to get to the way of the rounds, a marvel of its kind, pierced with thirty-three

large openings, thirty-seven loop-holes, and two hundred machicolations, down which the soldiers of feudal times poured boiling oil and molten lead on the heads of the besiegers. Its total length is one hundred and forty-two yards six inches, and its width varies from thirty-nine and a half inches to fifty-one and a half inches.

But if we were to enumerate everything which is of interest to visitors to the Château of Langeais this sketch of its past and present history would develop into a volume, so we will conclude by recalling the fact that when M. and Mme. Siegfried considered their work to be perfect they presented it to the Institute of France. At the same time they set aside a sum of money the interest of which will not only assure its perpetual preservation but will also enable other works of art to be purchased. In this way there will be formed a Museum of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a museum which will doubtless receive, as we ardently hope, the gifts and legacies of collectors of works of this fine period of French Art.

Left hand side of Exterior Façade.



Right hand side of Exterior Façade.

The Donjon.

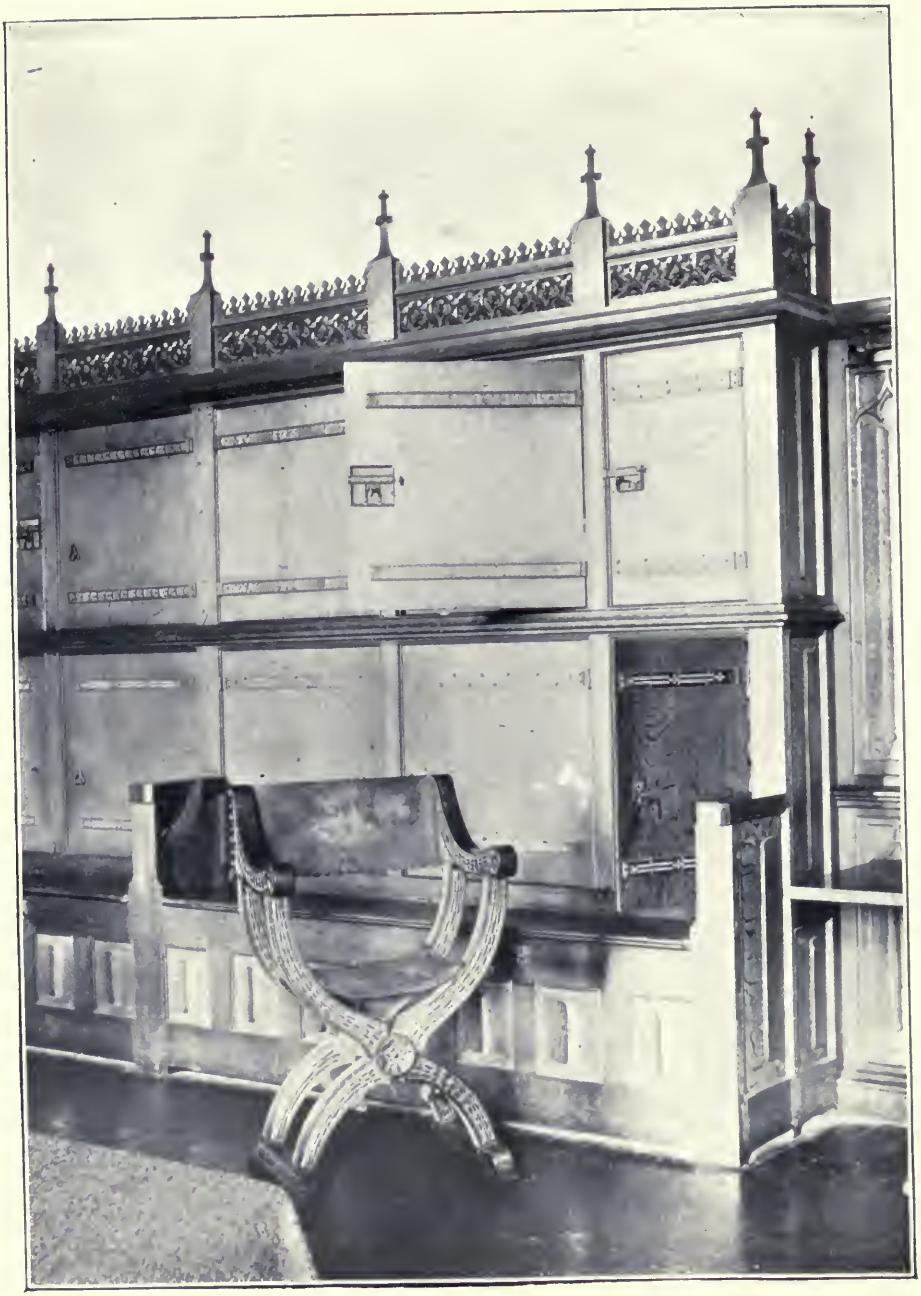
Interior Façade and Parterre.

A Doorway in the Courtyard.

The Vestibule.

The Salon des Fleurs.

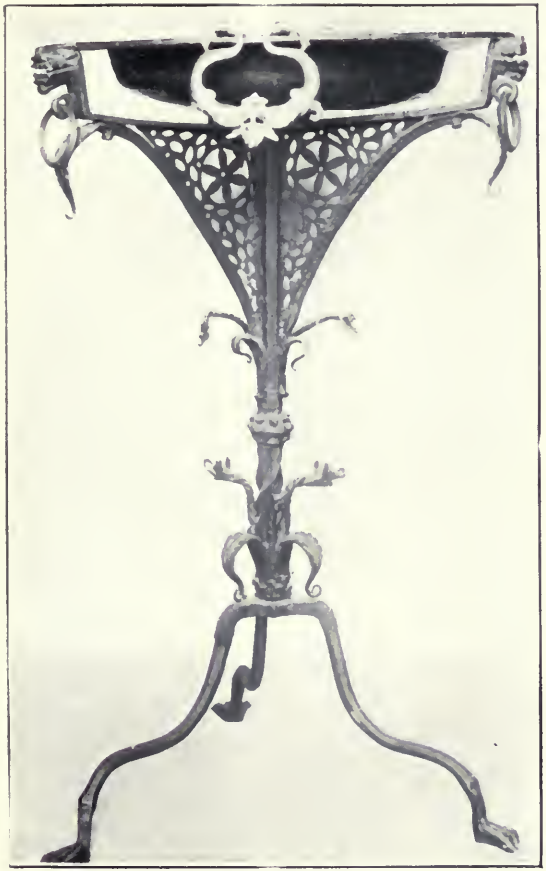
The Guard-room.



Cupboard in the Guard-room.

Mantel-piece in the Guard-room.

One of the fifteenth century Stalls in the Guard-room.



Stand for holding a brasier (Italian work) in the Guard-room.

Children's Chair in the Guard-room.

A Bedroom on the first floor.

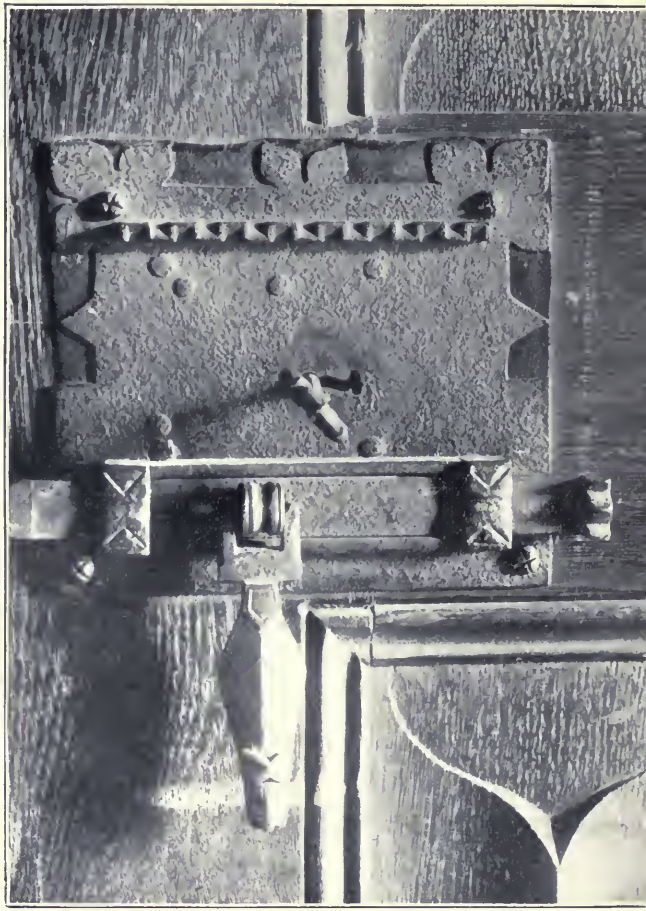
A Virgin in gilded wood, a Spanish Torch-holder with a fragment of a German Tapestry, and a fifteenth century Cabinet in a Bedroom on the first floor.

Another Bedroom on the first floor.

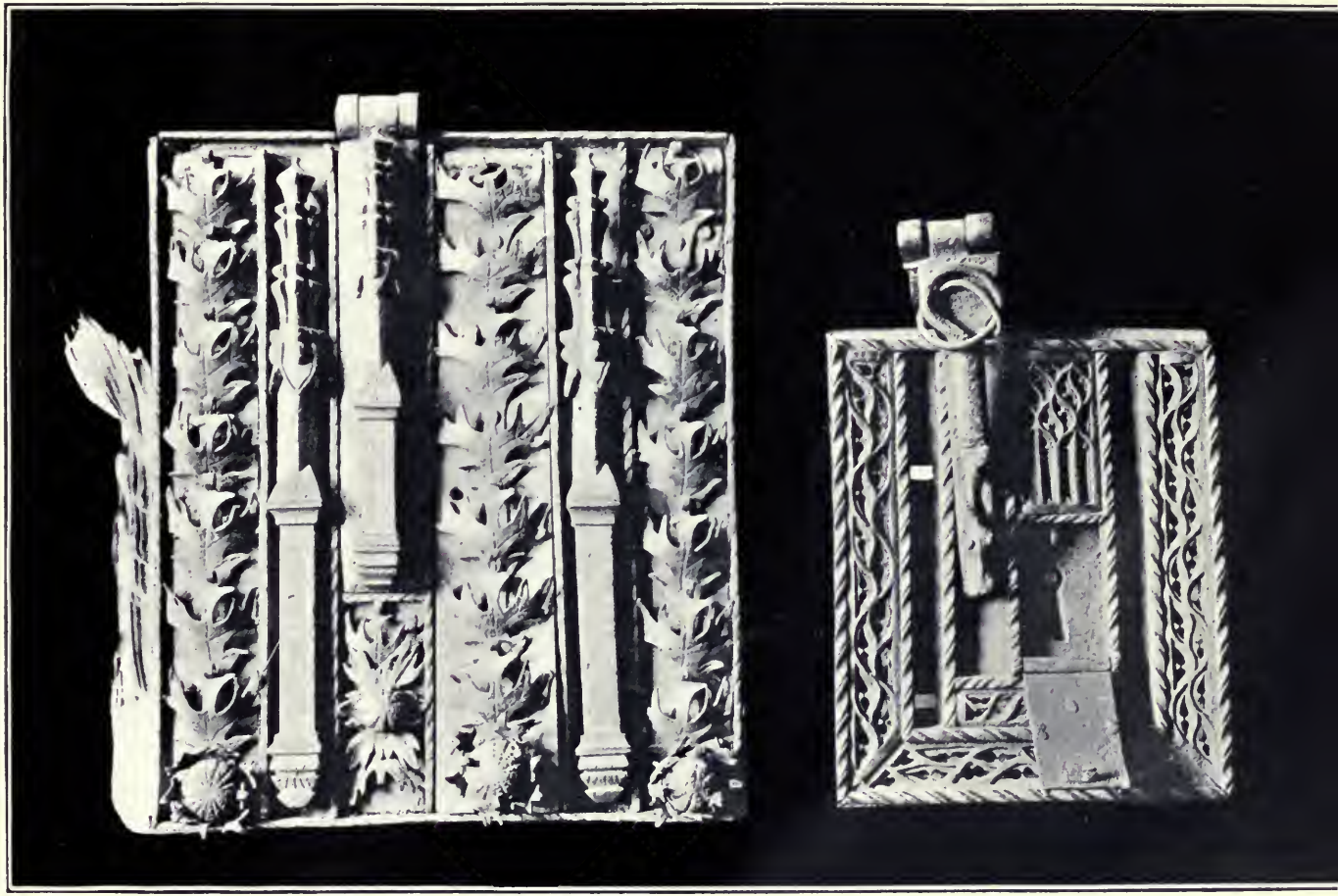
The large Drawing-room known as Anne of Brittany's Room.

A Bedroom on the second floor.

The old Prison Door.



One of the combined Locks and Bolts on the inner doors of the Château.



Two ancient wrought-iron Locks.

A portion of the way of the Rounds, showing the machicolations.

Ruins of the Donjon built by Fulk the Black.

LVDOVICI. XII. R.ª VXOR. ✝ ANNA. BRITANNI. FRANCI. REGINA. LVDOVICI. XI. RG. F.
ANNE DE BRETAIGNE
SECONDE ESPOVSE DV ROY LOVIS XII.
Du Cabinet de M.r Chappellain S.r de
Pulletcau Con.r et Secr.re du Roy
et de ses Finances.
·LVII

Anne of Brittany.

From an engraving by Jacques de Bil in the Print Department of the National Library.

Charles VIII.

From an engraving by Jacques de Bil in the Print Department of the National Library.

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